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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/22/2016
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KJUS](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: RECOMMENDATION TO RESTORE ASSISTANCE TO AIR COMBAT
COMMAND - 1 (CACOM-1)

REF: A. PATTERSON-RAMIREZ LETTER JANUARY 3 2003
[1](#)B. STATE 237099

Classified By: Ambassador William R. Brownfield.
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) The Department of State suspended U.S. assistance to Colombian Air Force Air Combat Command-1 (CACOM-1) in Puerto Salgar (Cundinamarca) in January 2003 due to the Air Force's refusal to accept responsibility for the bombing of the village of Santo Domingo (Arauca) on December 13, 1998 by a helicopter from CACOM-1. Seventeen civilians died in the incident, including seven children. Despite strong evidence to the contrary, then Air Force Commanding General Velasco repeatedly denied that a helicopter from CACOM-1 had bombed the village or that the Air Force was in any way responsible, insisting that a FARC truck bomb caused the deaths.

[1](#)2. (C) In a January 3, 2003 letter from Ambassador Patterson to Minister of Defense Ramirez (ref A), the Department informed GOC officials that the suspension would be lifted if the GOC provided a "credible account" of what happened at Santo Domingo. Subsequently, both sides agreed that suspension could be lifted if the civilian judiciary issued a verdict in the case. On September 21, the civilian 12th Circuit Criminal Court in Bogota found two pilots and one technician guilty of manslaughter for the accidental bombing, and sentenced them to six years of confinement. The Prosecutor General's Office (Fiscalia) is also considering additional charges of obstruction of justice and perjury against an Air Force major, the senior flight officer during the operation.

[1](#)3. (C) The convictions satisfy the conditions established by the Department for lifting the suspension of assistance to CACOM-1. After initial resistance, Air Force and Defense Ministry officials cooperated with the Fiscalia's investigation of the case. Moreover, the Air Force modified its rules of engagement after the Santo Domingo incident to minimize the possibility that such an incident could occur again.

[1](#)4. (C) ACTION REQUEST: Post recommends lifting the suspension of assistance to CACOM-1 due to the September 12 conviction of two pilots and one technician involved in the incident.
Brownfield